

new
823
A568

Abandoned!

By MORGAN ANDREWS.

A narrative of the fearful adventure that befell a young man in the service of the Hudson Bay Co. How he was left on a lonely and desolate island, in Lake Winnipeg, for eight days and nights. A complete account of his sufferings, sensations, and doings now written by himself for the first time.



ANY tales, true and otherwise, of the ocean have been narrated since Defoe wrote his great story of the castaway, but up to the present the huge inland lakes, or rather freshwater seas, of Great Britain's most extensive colony have not received the attention they deserve—despite the fact that many extraordinary events have taken place upon their great waters, as well as on the shores surrounding or on the islands that lie thickly everywhere. It is my intention to recount briefly the experiences of a castaway upon one of those islands—one which lies along the 53rd parallel, at the western side of Lake Winnipeg—a great, mysterious body of water, where our own tight country of England could lie like a raft, out of sight of land.

We left the quiet settlement of Selkirk during the first week of September, and steamed down the Red River towards the long flats of marshes that lie at the mouth. A full-blood Indian preacher and myself were the only passengers on board. Our destination was the mouth of the Great Saskatchewan, and I was returning north to Cedar Lake House, one of the stations of the Hudson's Bay Company. The weather was beautifully fine, and we steamed through the water at a rare speed, with nothing but a light swell that could have brought no disquietude to the worst sailor afloat, until, after four days, we reached Gull Harbour. This is a wild, romantic spot with Titanic tiers of black rock, backed by lofty terraces of sweeping hardwood trees right up to the distant sky-line.

Early in the morning we slipped away from this spot, and well can I remember the scene. I left my cabin, which I had to myself, as the mosquitoes were unbearable, and came up on deck, which was shining with moisture, and slippery with the clouds of spray that were beating up from the lee side with a wind that freshened considerably every minute. The half-breed and Norwegian sailors were rolling across a swaying gangway barrel after barrel of frozen fish, destined for the American market. On the log wharf, against which I could see the great waves breaking and creaming, a few greasy lanterns swayed and flickered; there were others upon the ship, and in the ghastly light flocks of gulls circled and screamed weirdly, before dropping down to the water like huge snow-flakes. Beyond, where the waves roared incessantly upon the rocks, I could see innumerable points of light, caused

by fireflies darting hither and thither like wind-borne sparks from some invisible bonfire. It was a strange, weird scene, and I leant against the side for some time, enjoying the grandeur of it all.

Presently the gangway was run in, the ropes came coiling on board like brown snakes, the propellers began to whip round, and we steamed away into the mist. I found the mate close to me, and I remarked to him, "Looks like a change in the weather, Sandy."

"It do so," he replied. "We're running straight for the Swamp, and we ought to strike it before the wind comes."

"What are we going there for?" I asked. "There's no one there now, eh?"

"Naw," he replied. "But there's a couple of fishing-boats to bring off—if the water's quiet enough."

Of the many islands lying upon Lake Winnipeg—and hundreds of them have probably never been marked by human footstep—Swamp Island, which is not to be found on any map, is perhaps the most remarkable. It is shaped like a horse-shoe, forming a large and somewhat treacherous harbour, partly filled with rocks and partly choked by sand-shoals. It is a fairly safe harbour for ships, as however violent a storm is raging outside, the water within is always peaceful. At the southern side is a much broken-down landing-stage of rotten logs, and, behind, a rough building, where the processes of curing and freezing the white fish are carried on during the season, which lasts from June, when the ice has cleared, till August. Behind this building again spreads a wilderness of black swamps, which smell horribly day and night, and give to the island the unwholesome reputation that it possesses. Northerners are a superstitious lot of men, and several have solemnly assured me that they have often listened to fearful cries, accompanied by the clashing of knives, arising from the impenetrable tangle of bush that covers the larger portion of the island. The bush is connected with the open by a long chain of sand dunes of irregular heights, thickly covered with long, wire-like grass, pointed like stings; and these sand-hills are bordered by stretches of shingle, where millions of rounded pebbles, like chips of black marble, flash and glimmer uncannily. Along the south side, leading up to the swamps, spreads a sand beach such as I have seen nowhere else. The finest beach along the English coast would be out of place in any

comparison. At irregular intervals you come across uncouth black shapes, half embedded in the silver sand. These are semi-petrified trunks of trees washed up by storms. One wonders where they formerly grew, and from what distant shore they have journeyed. The Indian, with his picturesqueness of language, would say that they had come from the Land of the Beyond.

It was early in the afternoon, after leaving Gull Harbour, that we emerged from the gloom and saw the pines on Swamp Island, tossing in the wind. Gloom I say, though it was in the daytime, and the summer; but one sees strange things in those latitudes. The sky was entirely overcast. We were enveloped by a hot, clammy mist, while the wind howled and roared; though, strangely enough, the water was comparatively calm. After one or two unsuccessful attempts we made the entrance of the harbour, and glided into quiet water, where we made fast to some stakes, which were cleared from the sand by a couple of sailors, who had clambered ashore in agile, monkey-like fashion. The only thing I could notice for some time was the intolerable odour of the swamps. Secured to the wharf were the two fishing-boats we had come to take away. Suddenly there was a rushing and a snarling, and a dozen bear-like animals dashed from behind the dark building and reached the water's edge. They were sleigh dogs, and I must here explain that they were the property of the fishermen, who had finished the work of their short season, and been taken off the island, together with a cargo of fish, some two weeks previously. It is their cruel custom to leave the poor brutes, used by them for purposes of draught, to take their chance of life or death alone upon this barren island. A supply of fish is left for them, but when this is consumed, the animals go mad with hunger, and finally tear one another

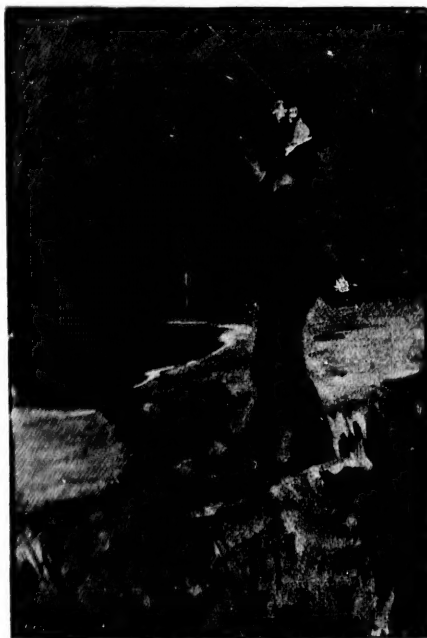
to pieces. Any who survive until the winter wander out on the ice-fields, and luckless is the Indian wanderer, or pale-faced adventurer, whom they espy cutting across the snow by the northern lights. There are many ghastly tales of flight from the mad dogs, and some more horrible ones of awful death—but this is apart from our present subject.

In addition to the boats, there was cargo to be shipped, in the shape of piles of nets, barrels of salt, boxes, and other similar things. The men set to work at once, and, convinced that the ship would lie at the island all night, accord-

ing to custom, I crossed the gangway, passed behind the buildings of the fishery, then over a sand hill, and down to the wonderful stretch of beach beyond. Here I was quite out of sight of the harbour; indeed, I was as completely isolated as it is possible to be in this world. A few of the dogs had followed. As they still had some food, they were disposed to be friendly, but I knew the curious temper of the brutes too well to encourage their advances.

As I lay sprawling upon the hot sand, it is perhaps natural that I should have given myself over to sentiment. I wondered how many men, socially and intellectually my equals, had passed along that wild shore; and whether the dainty feet of a lady of civilization had ever

imprinted a mark there. I went on to reflect upon home, and on what my friends would be doing. Surely I was wasting my time, and the talents that had been matured by a first-class education, in coming into this strange land, and living in solitude, when, perhaps—ah! it was only "perhaps" after all—I might have been enjoying myself in congenial society at home. Then I looked at the blue-black, ever-undulating plain of water, receding into the dark, sweeping gloom; the huge waves that hurled themselves fiercely to the shore, and broke creaming and foaming upon the white beach; the tossing



"I PASSED DOWN TO THE WONDERFUL STRETCH OF BEACH."

and straining tresses of a clump of pines upon a tiny island a little way out at sea; the queer black insects that jumped and wriggled all round me; and the glimmering surface of the low-lying swamp behind. I looked upon all this, and more, with the knowledge that I was the only sightseer, and at last I felt that here at least was an experience that many would desire to have.

It is a peculiarity of mine that, whenever I come ashore after a more or less lengthy voyage, I always have a tendency to sleep. Perhaps it is the feeling of perfect repose, after continual motion, that induces slumber. All I know is that, as I lay there on the soft sand at the side of the slope, I felt my eyes closing. I knew there was no cause for hurry, so I resigned myself to the drowsy influence without a struggle. For the next two hours I was oblivious to my surroundings.

It was only a few minutes, as it seemed, when I was disturbed. There came a shrill booming of the ship's siren down the wind—the "mocking bird" we called it, on account of its peculiar note. I smiled lazily to myself, and turned over. Supper-time, I mused. The last meal of the day was served at six. Well, there was

A sudden thrill of fear passed over me; my hands and feet were moist and cold. One of the dogs sprawled close beside me, and when I looked at him he wagged his bushy tail, arose, and stretched himself. Instantly there was confusion, and I found myself surrounded by the entire pack, yelling madly. At the same moment a feeling of isolation and alarm seized me; I felt lonely and depressed.

Why had the dogs left the sailors round the ship and crowded to me? Had anyone seen me come ashore? I had been talking with the Indian preacher, but I had left him to go to my cabin. I remembered then that they knew it was my custom to lie down in my berth before supper. I sprang up and rushed along the beach, the dogs after me. "It's all right," I said to myself, anxiously. "Sleep has made me silly. I shall see the men still working, and the ship lying near the wharf. There's no fear of them leaving before morning."

I reached the top of the sand-hill, where the rank grass lashed my feet incessantly. A cloud of wind and spray swept into my face and blinded me for the moment. I groped down the incline, fighting desperately with the rising storm, and trying, as it were, to part the intense

gloom with my hands. Presently I saw dimly. There were no men working along the shore, and *the ship was gone!* Round the harbour spread that terrible blackness, where the white-crested waves rose and fell in mournful cadence. The vessel, I knew, would be miles away by that time, for she was running with the wind.

At first I could scarcely grasp the entire meaning of my position: That the season had closed; that the last boat had left the island; that not another would touch there until the

ice cleared in the following June, some nine months ahead; that I was as the dogs beside me, and practically one of them; that I was a castaway on a desert island, with the great freshwater sea roaring around me.

The first thought that tortured me was not the fear of starvation, but the horror of loneliness.



"ONE OF THE DOGS SPRAWLED CLOSE BESIDE ME."

plenty of time; I was only ten minutes from the ship, so I resigned myself again to the arms of sleep.

A sudden gust of wind and the roar of waves beating near my feet aroused me. I sat up and looked about. The darkness had become intensified, while the storm was gathering fast.

Had
shou
prob
deud
then
toget
hand
desp
and
in sit
I w
fisher
of pr
It wa
into t
greet
broke
about
upon
aroun
madly
sand
try to
have
I had
red-wi
Indian
mixed
began
to me
ever ap
Inde
course
They d
wind c
Horse
search
confine
three
dropp
known
I co
buildi
violent
dreadf
creatur
throug
finishe
outside
away t
found
I man
mined,
to keep
in abun
the wh
able p
over to
of the

Had a congenial companion been with me I should not have cared very much. I should probably have said, "Well, old man, this is the deuce of a fix," or something of the sort, and then we could have discussed our position together. It is so very difficult to act single-handed—one is so inclined to give up in despair at once. It is only through discussion and by suggestion that we can obtain our ideas in situations like this.

I went back to the insecure building of the fishery. Near the crazy door I saw a great pile of putrid fish, covered with crawling insects. It was not an inviting sight, and I turned away into the building itself. A horrible musty smell greeted me. There were boxes and heaps of broken staves, iron hoops, and the like, lying about in the semi-darkness. I sat helplessly upon a barrel, while the dogs gathered up around me silently. The wind was rushing madly all round, and drifting the little piles of sand into ridges along the walls. I began to try to think. Blessed tobacco! What I should have done without it just then, I can't imagine. I had half a large plug, and a small bag of red-willow root—*kanikanik*, to give it its Indian name. I cut off some of the weed, mixed it with the sweet-smelling willow, and began to smoke. Tobacco had been food to me before that day, but I don't think I ever appreciated it so fully as I did then.

Indeed, I became positively cheerful. Of course, they would miss me upon the ship. They couldn't turn back in the teeth of that wind certainly, but so soon as they came to Horse Island they would dispatch a tug to search for me. Probably I should not be confined to my desert island longer than three days—provided that the storm dropped. But would it drop? I had known them to last for over a week.

I could not stay in the weird, evil-smelling building. Occasionally the dogs barked violently, and I would start round with the dreadful thought that some unnatural creatures were trying to gain admission through the closed door. My smoke finished—I could not indulge in the luxury outside, as the wind would have blown away the pipe's contents in an instant—I found a fairly sequestered corner, and here I managed to start a fire, which I determined, as my stock of matches was limited, to keep going night and day. There was fuel in abundance, and I made trips to and from the wharf until I had built up a considerable pile. Then I thought I would cross over to the beach and try to drag back some of the black logs. Wherever I went the

dogs followed persistently. Sometimes I shuddered at the thought that perhaps they regarded me as their prospective prey. I came to the sand dunes, but when I looked down I stopped with another shudder. I suppose most people have read that strange work of Jules Verne's, "A Journey to the Centre of the Earth." I knew the book well, and when I came to the summit of that hill, I felt much the same as I should think the adventurers in that book must have felt when they came to that mysterious underground sea, filled with the creatures of primeval ages. The sky overhead pressed down like the roof of a huge cave. For a little way I could behold the livid sea heaving and roaring against a wall of total blackness. The level and brilliant beach, two hundred yards and more in width, was unspeakably ghastly in that unnatural light. It stretched along like an endless white road through the night, marked by the contorted black shapes of the petrified trunks which, to my imagination, now assumed the form of dreadful monsters, and began to crawl menacingly towards me; and from the right came the foul odour of the swamps. No pen could do the slightest justice to that awful scene.



"I STARTED UP WITH A HALF CRY OF FEAR."

I need not dwell upon the events of that night. Though I had often slept by myself, out on the prairie or in the forest, and was well accustomed to the wild orchestra of the night that is so terrifying to the "tenderfoot," I could find no rest. I sat by the ruddy glow of my fire, with the storm howling around, and with the constant beating of the surges and the yells of the frightened birds in my ears. The weary hours passed slowly, while the dogs sprawled all round me, happy to have discovered a friend. I owe a great deal to those dogs. In spite of their company, however, I started up more than once with a half cry of fear. I knew that the island was uninhabited, yet somehow I could have sworn that, in a faint glimmer of light, I had seen an uncouth figure dart up to the summit of the line of sand-hills, and disappear again in an instant. Probably this was nothing more than a cloud of spray cast up from some wave that had broken against the rocks of the southern shore. But I was a terrible coward that night.

At last the morning came—though it was not an easy matter to distinguish between day and night. Darkness still hung over Swamp Island, while the storm had greatly increased in fury. Then came a truly terrifying fear to torment me—suppose that *the ship had been wrecked, and had gone down with all hands!* In that case, if I could maintain existence for myself and the dogs for so long, my only chance would be to wait for the settling of the Arctic winter. Then I should have to make a sleigh, harness the dogs to it, and travel over the ice across the hundreds of miles that separated me from any human habitation. Of course, I could never really have done this, but I would not allow myself to think so.

I had no idea of the month, or the day of the week. There is no Sunday in the far north, and the handful of inhabitants get strangely lax regarding dates. I myself have often been more than a month out in my reckoning. At all events, I called this day the second of my captivity, and recorded the fact with my knife upon a corner post of the log building. Then I set forth to forage.

After a couple of hours' work my larder

was stocked as follows: About half a hundred assorted shell-fish, which I had gathered from the rocks of the harbour, together with a handful of freshwater prawns; they had terrible eyes, these last. An armful of glutinous weed, also from the harbour rocks. From the swamps I got a quantity of red berries which, when squashed, emitted a nauseous, black juice; they were too obviously poison, and I rejected them. Several slimy black creatures, like great slugs, were also included. I made several resolute attempts at these, but I could not touch them—even the dogs were frightened at their horrid appearance. Finally—by way of a *bonne bouche*—a score of frogs, the ordinary singing variety. These were very ill-flavoured, but still I ate them. I say no more on this subject. Oh, the delights of good tobacco after that meal!

My next step was to explore the island. I travelled along the narrow central portion, until I came to the bush. Here thousands of Arctic pines sprang from a thick bed of white moss. I took a few steps and the moss disappeared, and a quantity of viscid mud came bubbling up over my boots. I gave it up in despair, and fought my way along on the sand-spit between the trees and the water, very often knee-deep in slimy liquid. Presently I came to an obstacle in the shape of a mass of red rock. At least I thought it was rock, but, when I grasped a part, I found it was only mud, that left a scarlet stain upon my hands and clothes. Somehow I fought my way round to the western shore, and here, to my delight, I came across some *kani-kanik* bushes. I laid bare the roots with my knife, and peeled off some of the bark.



"I FOUND THE SKELETON OF A WRECKED FISHING BOAT."

When
to dr
boat,
melan
with
ribs,
runni
from
that,
dogs
no id
The
toward
phore
The d
follow
have i
3RD
A litt
frighte
to stra
and m
and a
News.
string a
in the
the ne
smoked
by the
here.
everywh
of serpe
4TH
head.
skeleton
thought
see Old
what's t
Kept a
frightens
more fi
swamp.
eating r
I've rea
much f
out of
least.
authors
boats, cl
how they
times, an
fit to use
wind slac
shore, rec
my voice
could any
amused,
gulls. M
Not the

When I got back I buried it beneath the fire to dry. Here, also, I found a wrecked fishing-boat, or, rather, the skeleton of one. It was a melancholy sight, as it lay up on a sand-spit, with the water rushing through its weed-covered ribs, and scores of horrid-looking insects running all over it. I turned away quickly from the unpleasant spectacle. I may mention that, in all my wanderings, every one of the dogs followed faithfully at my heels. They had no idea of losing me.

The storm showed no signs of abating, but towards evening there was a little more phosphorescent light, and this made me hopeful. The doings of the next few days are recorded as follows on some scraps of paper I happened to have in my pocket.

3RD DAY.—Wind still furious and sky like ink. A little sleep last night, but woke terribly frightened, with the idea that someone was trying to strangle me. Searched the building thoroughly and made great discoveries. An old fishing-net and a mutilated copy of the *Illustrated London News*. Mended the former with some bits of string and caught two whitefish and a jackfish in the harbour off the piles. The jackfish tore the net horribly. Had a fine supper, then smoked and read the *J.L.N.* over and over again by the fire-light. Wonder how the paper got here. Sea wilder than ever. Spray flying everywhere. Fire hissing all the time like a nest of serpents.

4TH DAY.—Awful night. Got silly ideas in my head. Dreamed that I saw myself lying a skeleton on the beach. Walked about and thought of home a lot. Don't suppose I shall see Old England again. Yes, I shall. But what's the use of thinking about such things? Kept away from the great south beach. It frightens me. Don't know why. Caught no more fish, but ate horrible things from the swamp. Made me feel sick and ill. Poor dogs eating rotten fish. Don't believe in the stories I've read of men on desert islands doing so much for themselves and making everything out of nothing. I can't help myself in the least. Should like to have some of the authors with me now, and see them make boats, clothes, and all the rest of it. Wonder how they'd start to work. Read *J.L.N.* lots of times, and dug up *kanikanik*. Quite dry and fit to use. Storm dropped a bit in evening, and wind slackened. Much warmer. Walked about shore, reciting Shakespeare and Virgil at top of my voice. Should have looked an awful fool could anyone have seen me. Even dogs seemed amused, but it did me good. Tried to catch gulls. Much too artful. More frogs for supper. Not the eating sort, as they're very nasty.

Afraid I shall have to kill one of the dogs. Don't like to.

5TH DAY.—Quite light again. Thank God! Storm practically over, though the water is choppy and nasty. Wind S.E., I think. Great luck. Caught three whitefish and more than a dozen goldeyes with bent pin. Saw a great sturgeon in the water off the piles. Chucked a rock at him, and he cleared off. Running short of tobacco. Don't know what I shall do when it's gone. Smell from swamps horrible. Bit silly in evening. Sat on sand-hill for hours, and watched for signs of smoke. Clear on horizon. Sang hymns and songs for a long time. At night clouds broke and the moon came out. Aurora appeared faintly in the north, and the wind dropped to a whisper. Silence dreadful. Island looked ghastly. Getting light-headed from worry and want of sleep.

6TH DAY.—Storm entirely over. Lovely day. Bathed in the harbour, and felt refreshed. Trying not to *think*. Tobacco all gone. Broke down and cried. Don't remember when I've cried before, and don't know what I did it for. Weakness, I suppose. Think I'd better kill dogs. As I get weaker, and they get ravenous, they may kill me. They'll have plenty of food then. Went and got more *kanikanik*. Saw hulk again, with the creatures still crawling over it. Made me feel queer. Thought I saw smoke in the north. Only clouds after all. Why don't they send boat? Surely they haven't forgotten me. Were they wrecked? But I won't think of it. Wrote some silly poetry.

7TH DAY.—Very hot. Sea covered in early morning by gossamers. Wondered where they had come from. Feeling weak and ill and very hungry. Would give anything for a bit of bread and a good bottle of beer. Watched almost all day from the sand-hills. Saw nothing. Water like a sheet of glass out to the horizon.

8TH DAY.—Last night there were bells ringing everywhere—suppose it was my brain. Almost maddening this suspense, and insects very bad. Cloudy, and rather chilly. Wind north-easterly, so far as I can judge, but have no compass, no watch, nothing at all. Can't eat the frogs or the prawns. Picked up dead gull on the shore. Seemed fresh, so cooked and ate it. Not nice, but finding it cheered me up. Wonderful sunset. Sea and sky like blood. Dogs getting ill-tempered. [Here the entries cease.]

Just after dark that evening I fancied I heard a shrill sound in the north. There were so many strange sounds in my head by this time that I put it down as false, but when another hour had passed the sound came again and again. I ran on to the sand-hills, strained my eyes, and shrieked for joy. The moon was bright, and I

could just see a dim line of misty vapour that might have been cloud or smoke. After a long waiting—oh, the fearful suspense of it!—a black object appeared on the waves; suddenly it fell, and rose again. I saw sparks flying, and later something white fluttering in the breeze. I heard the panting and throbbing of the engines, and then I knew that the boat had come for me at last.

There were two Swedes on board, besides my late fellow-passenger, the Indian preacher, who had insisted on coming back for me. I actually fell on the latter's neck when he sprang ashore, but my memory is very hazy concerning events that happened just then. We steamed away at once from Swamp Island, and I have never set eyes on the inhospitable spot since.

I learnt that the captain, on that fateful afternoon when I was abandoned, had reckoned that he could reach the mouth of the Saskatchewan before the storm broke. He was, of course, mistaken. The fishing-boats were utterly wrecked, and they themselves had considerable difficulty in reaching Horse Island. I had not been missed until the following morning. They thought, of course, I was lying down unwell, and during the height of the storm everyone had himself to think of.

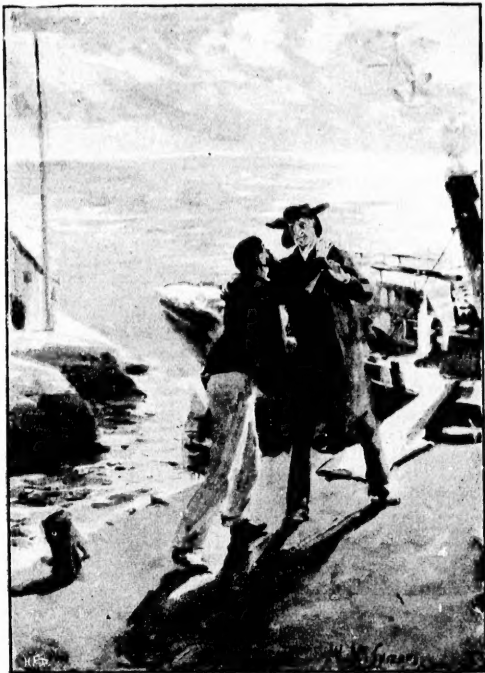
Thus ended a very dreadful experience. Though every detail of the island is stamped upon my brain, I can remember comparatively

little of my doings. It is like a dream now. However, I can remember walking up and down the wonderful sand stretch, that I have here called the "southern beach," thinking that I was at an English watering-place, and wondering where all the people had gone, and what they had done with the pier, the bathing-

machines, and the pleasure boats. Also, I can remember once allowing myself to be tormented by thirst, because I could not believe that the great sea roaring and rushing round the island was really composed of fresh water. I knew that salt water was maddening, therefore I would not drink it until my mind became clearer and I understood where I was.

I am what is known as a handy man, but I could do literally nothing to aid myself. I had eight dreary days of it, but I think I should have lost my senses in another week. It wasn't the solitude; I was accustomed to that. It was the awful strain

upon the mind, combined with lack of proper food and rest. Had I been abandoned on a clear day, all might have been different. As it was, all along I was tortured by the thought (and you cannot dismiss these thoughts) that the ship had been wrecked and had gone down with all hands. Of course, if that had been the case, this narrative would never have been written.



"I FELL ON THE INDIAN PREACHER'S NECK."

eam now.
and down
have here
ing that I
l wonder-
and what
bathing-
and the
e boats.
n remem-
allowing
o be tor-
y thirst,
could not
that the
a roaring
ing round
was really
of fresh
knew that
was mad-
herefore I
t drink it
mind be-
arer and I
ood where

what is
s a handy
I could do
nothing to
lf. I had
ary days of
I think I
have lost
es in an-
week. It
e solitude:
accustomed
It was
ful strain
k of proper
ndoned on
ferent. As
he thought
ughts) that
had gone
if that had
ould never